

An estimated 76 million people fall sick from foodborne illnesses each year. Recent attacks against the nation have heightened awareness that food, especially imported food, could be used as a vehicle for terrorism.

HHS Ensured Food Safety

HHS through the FDA, regulates 80 percent of all food consumed in the United States to promote food safety and reduce or eliminate foodborne illnesses. The task of ensuring a safe food supply has become more difficult because the nature of food and foodborne illness has changed significantly. Foods are technologically more complex; the number of foodborne pathogens has increased fivefold in the past 50 years; consumers are eating more of the foods at higher risk; and our vulnerable populations have increased. In addition to its on-going efforts to safeguard the nation's food supply, recently HHS focused its efforts on preventing mad cow disease and on international cooperation.

Preventing Mad Cow Disease

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), also known as Mad Cow Disease, is a brain-wasting disease that affects cattle. The United Kingdom's 180,000 cases of BSE make up the vast majority of cases so far, but to date the United States has not seen any cases of the disease. This is in large part due to the efforts of FDA. Many FDA regulated products contain bovine products in addition to food itself. FDA and its state counterparts continued inspections of renderers, feed mills, ruminant feeders, protein blenders, feed haulers, and distributors in FY 2001 to ensure that BSE did not become a part of the food supply or medical products. In FY 2001, FDA accomplished 37 percent rather than the targeted 50 percent biennial inspection coverage of registered animal drug and feed establishments because resources were shifted to work on the priority BSE inspections. This shift enabled the completion of FDA's goal to inspect 100 percent of renderers,

protein blenders and feed mills and the development of a new goal to inspect 100 percent of renderers, protein blenders and feed mills which handle prohibited material annually, and to conduct sampling of ruminant feeders. Prior to this event, FDA had exceeded its FY 2000 target for inspecting 27 percent of registered animal drug and feed establishments. The FY 2000 result was 39 percent inspected.

To further strengthen the nation's food supply, Secretary Thompson released a four-point action plan in August 2001. The plan will increase protections for Americans against BSE through the coordinated efforts of FDA and Department of Agriculture (inspections), CDC (surveillance), and NIH (research).

U.S./Mexico Cooperative Agreement

The FDA, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Mexico's Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación (SAGARPA) and Secretaría de Salud signed a cooperative agreement in September 2001 to enhance existing food safety measures through expanding programs, sharing information, and coordinating specific activities. The agreement will operate to share information on the sources of fresh produce and to investigate the causes of any contamination of these products. The USDA's Food Safety

and Inspection Service and Foreign Agriculture Service and SAGARPA will take steps to ensure the safety of meat, poultry, and egg products in both countries. These efforts are expected to ensure that borders remain open and that safe products continue to flow freely between the countries. The agencies will also collaborate on other specific projects to achieve common understanding on issues of mutual concern.

Regulatory Initiatives

In FY 2001 FDA also worked to improve food safety through issuing regulations and guidance including:

- ✱ *A compliance policy guide and a field inspection guide on allergens to help in assessing conditions that can cause foods to contact allergens.*
- ✱ *A final rule on food labeling, safe handling, and refrigeration of shell eggs for retail establishments such as grocery stores, nursing homes, and restaurants.*
- ✱ *A proposed rule concerning food developed through biotechnology.*

